

Racism in Toronto Schools

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Abstract

The racism encountered by racialized youth within school systems has a negative impact on their educational experiences. This phenomenon is particularly salient for youth from Regent Park who also navigate many different forms of marginalization that already create barriers to education such as stigma/labels of being from Regent Park, poverty, and religious/cultural background. Racism impacts racialized youth's educational success, their identity and at times pushes them out of the system in large numbers. It further amplifies the marginalization experienced due to poverty, religion, age, and gender. Here, these experiences are analyzed through the lens of Critical Race Theory, which puts race at the center of understanding structures, policies and practices within systems such as the Education. This research project worked to bring forward the experiences and impact of racism in schools through the narrative of racialized youth from Regent Park. Six youth from Regent Park engaged in a Participatory Visual Methodology, to create a cellphilm documenting their experiences/impact of racism in Toronto schools. The cellphilm became a medium through which narratives of the experiences of racism within Toronto schools and the impact it has on these six youths was documented and validated.

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Foreword

My journey into this research project dates back to my experience as a racialized young person navigating through the education system in Toronto. Years later, I heard echoes of these experiences in the narratives of racialized youth in Regent Park. Why had so little changed? Through many years working as a Student Parent Support Worker with the Pathways to Education program in Regent Park, I gained insight into understanding the barriers and challenges that youth, particularly racialized youth, were facing in schools. The courses and field experiences I have undertaken in my Masters in Environmental Studies programme has provided an even deeper understanding of how race plays a vital role in shaping the experiences of racialized youth in school systems. My research project aimed to provide voice to the unacknowledged experiences of racialized youth. The project became a tool to further the conversation about the issue of racism in Toronto schools. The process documented and discussed the experiences and impact racism in schools has had on racialized youth while engaging them in a Visual Research Methodology in which they created cellphilm.

This project supported me in gaining and solidifying the learning objectives I set out in my Plan of Study. The insights and reflections of these racialized youth further solidified my understanding of how experiences of racism in school and the different forms of marginalization such as, location, race and religion, impact and create barriers/challenges to their learning/experiences at school. Engaging in a participatory visual methodology such as creating a cellphilm allowed me to see its effectiveness in cultivating engagement with youth in addressing issues that impact them. The project provided evidence that art-based research/cultural productions fosters dialogue about social issues that leads to creating awareness about issues between individual, community and stakeholder.

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Introduction

My professional inquiry into racism in education, specifically in Toronto schools, started early in my work with the Pathways to Education programme, about 17 years ago. From then to now, I have witnessed the prevalence of racism in schools through the lived experiences of the youth I have been working with and my own experiences as a support staff. My experience of racism in school, however, didn't start there. Having migrated to Canada at the age of 8 from Sri Lanka, without understanding the languages or the culture of this foreign land, I personally experienced racism through many years of 'education' in Toronto schools. It is these collective knowledges and experiences that guided me to my Master in Environmental Studies to pursue formal research about the experiences of racism in Toronto schools.

What I have learned, from my own experience through the Canadian education system and in my experience supporting racialized youth within the education system, is that racism is very much a reality in Toronto schools. The education system still remains one that is imbedded in projecting and protecting 'white' ideology. The experiences of 'white' is seen as the dominant/'norm' and becomes the base from which all 'others' are perceived. As an immigrant, I still seek to find my identity and place in Canada. Having been through over 9 years in the school system, it failed to provide me a place to understand, ground and find myself. Schools do a little bit more superficially in the 'hallways', such as celebration of ethnic food and playing music from different languages/cultures, for 'othered' students, but very little is still being done in the classroom to reflect their stories or their identities. Moreover, what I continue to see is how the experiences of racialized youth are questioned and their voices silenced. I believe it is important to keep researching and documenting these experiences and issues. I hope that building the

evidence will hold systems accountable and generate movement towards re-evaluating policies and practices to create a more inclusive and equitable education system. Moreover, continuing to bring this issue to the forefront through participatory research is important because it provides space and gives validity to the experiences of racism among racialized youth.

When I entered my first semester in the MES program, I knew I wanted my research to include the youth that sparked my interest in the issue of racism in the education system. What I didn't know at that time was how I was going to go about doing that. For the most part, my only understanding of research was it takes the form of an academic paper. Engaging in the participatory research methodology course completely changed my perspective of research. It was through this course that I first came to learn about Participatory Visual Methodology (PVM). In the course, we partnered with the Consent Is project, where participants used art to speak and illustrate about what 'consent' meant for them. It had a huge impact on me; I was inspired to bring a similar approach to my own research. As my goal was to engage racialized youth that I work with to bring awareness to their experiences, I decided I would create a cellphilmusing PVM, to document their narrative about the experiences of racism in schools. I wanted to provide an alternative to how we can access and bring forward the narratives of the more marginalized in our communities. This paper will speak to how PVM was used as the methodology in making a cellphilm about the narratives of racialized youth and their lived experiences of racism. I supported and facilitated the dialogue and creating of a cellphim documenting the narratives of six racialized youth in Regent Park.

Critical Race Theory

Racism is very much a part of all aspects of our society. Its imbedded in our systems, our cultures and our physical environments. It impacts our everyday lives. The institution of education, which is rooted in white dominance, continues to be a place imbedded in racism. To understand how it's policies, practices and culture is laced with racism, it is crucial to examine education through the lens of Critical Race Theory.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) places race at the center of understanding educational inequality, uncovering how policies and practices fail to meet the needs of the most marginalized populations and protects the interest of the 'dominant' group. It is important to remember "by taking up CRT as theoretical framework, one is not necessarily privileging race over class, gender, or other identity category" (Ladson-Billings, 2003, p. 57). CRT is tool that can foster awareness, dialogue, and challenge how the inequalities in our societies continue to exist (Ladson-Billings, 2003). Informing ourselves of CRT's perspective that racism is a social construct and challenging the practice of liberalism within education gives us a deeper understanding of how policies and practices in the education system produces barriers to access to education for racialized youth. The Safe School Act, and it's zero tolerance policy has pushed racialized, particularly black youth, out of school in disproportionate numbers. The practice of removing youth out of classroom only serves to create gaps in learning, leading to higher dropout rates among racialized youths. The construct of race is understood to favour white people and pushes everyone else to feel 'othered.' This maintains whiteness as the norm, while upholding power and privilege. Liberalism functions under the ideology of 'individual' and that every person is equal and so are responsible for their own outcomes (Vanhouwe, 2007). These

understandings guide how I approached my research project and my analysis of the narratives of the youth I engaged with through this project.

The element of CRT in which I grounded my project is the valuing of counter-stories to stress the importance of experiential knowledge. CRT establishes that validating the lived experiences of racial minorities and bringing forth their narrative to counter the stories of the ‘dominant’ voices is critical in challenging prevailing beliefs and assumptions. The voices of the privileged are constantly working to deny the experiences of the ‘other’. Supporting those on the margins to tell their stories is one way to give back voice so that they can describe their experiences in their own words. Vanhowe (2007) states that “Stories enable one to construct different pictures of social and historical conditions and to incorporate different epistemologies to make sense of the world in ways different from the dominant white view” (p.34). Providing space for dialogue also supports youth in understanding their experiences and being able to name the different forms of racism and discriminations they face (Edwards & Ruggiano Schmidt, 2006). When we bring these stories to the forefront, we can start changing the dominant discourses that are rooted in racism and discriminations. These stories provide evidence of how racial minority communities have been thriving and maintaining their culture and identities through the many hundreds of years of oppression. The hope of my project is to keep the conversation about racism in school at the forefront of the homes, communities and schools that the youth attend.

Methodology

I have been working as a community worker within racialized communities for the last 20 years. I have witnessed the resilience and power of these communities as they navigate their survival through systems and structures that were created without them in mind. In finding their livelihoods, they have built alternative connections, communities and spaces to foster wellbeing. Mainstream spaces often still feel unfamiliar to them as these spaces continue to operate in manners that (intentionally and unintentionally) make them feel ‘othered’.

Working within these diverse communities, in particular with the youth, I noted how critically aware young people are of the experiences they have within these structures that are consistently expecting youth to assimilate without questioning. The most fulfilling part of my job has been facilitating conversations that allowed for youth experiences to be shared and validated. Seeing youth as experts of their own lives, I decided that I wanted to highlight their voices and stories in my research. Consequently, I decided to pursue a Participatory Visual Methodology.

Participatory Visual Methodology (PVM) shares elements with Critical Race Theory with its emphasis in giving participants the power to tell their stories and acknowledging them as the experts of their lived experiences. Powels (2015) argues that research should be beneficial for the participants and our role as researcher ought to be supporting communities to solve issues rather than think about our own personal gains. The process of PVM fosters an equitable space; it allows for researchers to engage the community in creating knowledge and gives participants power to make decisions in ‘planning, implementation and dissemination’ of the research (Lorenz and Kolb, 2009).

I felt it especially important to choose an accessible methodology such as Participatory Visual Methodology because I intended to work with racialized young people. It's said that 'young people can sometimes voice themselves through visual materials more comfortably than traditional' (Yang and MacEntee, 2015, p.614). This methodology is understood to be particularly more effective in bringing awareness to the experiences of the more marginalized in our society as their 'voices' are often silenced (Yang and MacEntee, 2015).

For this research project, I used cellphilming. Cellphilming is a Participatory Visual Methodology through which videos/short-films are created using cellphones or tablets/iPads. I felt this technological approach would feel both familiar and accessible to youth. I trusted it would support in providing a 'safer' approach than other video making forms which may have been less familiar. I did not want to create feelings of further disconnection. Cellphilms bring participants an 'alternative experience' and understanding as they engage in creating, producing and sharing their film(s) (Treffry-Goatley et. al, 2017). The 'films' that are created can be used to "promote community dialogue and engage decision-makers in pursuing actionable change with community perspective and experiences in mind" (Yang and MacEntee, 2015). The intention for this project was to engage in and support a critical conversation about issues impacting racializing young people, namely their experiences of racism in Toronto schools. I hope the youths that participated in the project become agents for actions for change by using the cellphilms as a medium to further the conversation about this issue with communities and stakeholders.

Process

Approaching this project through a pandemic really shifted the initial plans of the project. I originally planned out a youth-engaged group project that would take place in community

space. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and safety precautions, our project ended up being a completely virtual engagement. Recruitment was particularly challenging. Normally, it would be easy to recruit youth from our drop-in spaces and programming. But, I was working with a heightened environment of youth (physical and social) disengagement. The pandemic had shifted young people's 'normal' and further amplified their 'vulnerabilities'. My criteria for participants was that they were racialized youth between the ages of 16-19 years, living in Regent Park. I recruited students within the Pathways to Education program who showed interest in engaging in the program based on knowing about my plan of study. My initial set of participants changed as the world was starting to address the pandemic and I could no longer meet with youth in person to proceed with the project. As everything moved to virtual interaction, youths were finding themselves dealing with new challenges and could not commit continuing to participate at that given time. I also took the time off to reassess how I proceed with the project. In mid-September 2020, I re-recruited for project participants, it took a longer time period to come to a conclusive group of youth who wanted to commit their time as youths who had shown initial interests felt they had too much they were already having to navigate through due to the pandemic. In the process of getting the project off the ground, the core group of youth I was working with shifted three times.

The cellphilm project consisted of six racialized youth from Regent Park. All of them identified as South Asian and ranged in age from 16 to 18. Four identified as female and two as male. We met weekly on Zoom for six consecutive weeks. Each session was approximately 90 minutes. We started in the first week of November 2020 and the last session was complete in the second week of December 2020. During this time, the youth were in full time day school virtually or in person, working part-time jobs and in other extracurricular activities. This caused

some challenges in scheduling initially but soon after we were able to situate ourselves on an evening that worked for everyone. The project culminated in a short film which can be viewed here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/10gCIIWpszMkubjtKIVsZkrZktHkdaVz0/view>

Zoom Meeting 1:

On the first meeting, we discussed the purpose of the project. I introduced cellphilming as a methodology and explained what informed consent meant. Youth were excited about being a part of the project and spoke about it being a relevant issue especially given the global climate of anti-black racism. Youth participants were sent consent forms via email.

Zoom Meeting 2:

During the second meeting, we discussed the issue of racism in Toronto schools. Youth were asked to speak about their personal or ‘witnessed’ experiences of racism in their schools. Youth were invited to respond to the following questions on a google document to further continue the conversation virtually:

- 1) What are your thoughts on racism in Toronto Schools?*
- 2) Write down your experiences of racism in your school.*
- 3) What changes in school culture or practices are needed to have equity and inclusivity in Toronto schools?*

Zoom Meeting 3:

We discussed the themes that arose out of the responses from the discussion questions from last meeting. We talked more about experiences of racism, how racism has played out in classrooms and the impact it has on youths.

We also talked about what kind of movie we wanted to make. Youth were familiar with how to use cellphones to capture images/video, so we quickly moved our discussion into

thinking about images, spaces and the use of storyboarding to create a ‘film’. With students doing school virtually, they felt limited in their ability to film school spaces as the backdrop to their narrative. Instead, youth suggested making a film using Zoom. They felt it was their current reality and wanted to depict a racist scenario that they would experience in the classroom environment played out in a virtual ‘classroom’. They continued their work on developing the scenario by working on a storyboard and script on the google document. The plan was to complete their storyboard and script and ‘shoot’ at the next zoom meeting.

Zoom meeting 4:

I received some feedback from a couple of youth that they were not feeling connected to the role-playing method. They did not want to ‘recreate’ their lived experience. We regrouped and talked about the initial plan. Instead, we decided to move ahead with everyone self-filming a short reflection using a cellphone. Rather than simulating their experiences of racism, the youth decided to document their personal narratives. The group discussed the length of film, backdrop, lighting and framing possibilities. Youth were given the following questions to guide and process their thoughts:

1. *What is racism? How does it look, sound and feel?*
2. *Name experiences of prejudice, overt bias, stereotyping and/or discrimination you have had in your schools.*
3. *How do these experiences or other practices in the classroom/school act as barrier to your learning/education?*
4. *What changes need to be incorporated to create a more safe and inclusive space for you?*

Youth were given a week to capture their narratives using a cellphone. Once they completed recording themselves, they sent the videos to me via email for me to work along two of the youth to edit into a ‘film’.

Zoom Meeting 5:

I collaborated with two of the youth who wanted to participate in working on editing the videos to create the final ‘film’. The process consisted of viewing all the individual video submissions and selecting the clips to be used and storyboarding. Two of the youth volunteered to complete the film as they have had previous experience in editing and creating film.

Zoom Meeting 6:

All the youth participants met to view the final ‘film’. The film documents youth in the project validating experiences of racism in Toronto schools by speaking about their own experiences of racism, the impact these experiences have on them and what they would recommend for change. All the youth stated being happy with the overall project, especially the film they produced. They would like to share their work and continue the conversation about racism in schools in different spaces such agencies that serve young people in schools, they specifically are excited to share it with their peers. None of them wanted it to go to their schools, for worry about if it will set them up in a ‘negative’ lens with the administrations/teachers.

Narratives of Racialized Youth

The main purpose of this research project was to provide a space and tool for bringing forth the stories, knowledges and experiences of racism through the ‘voices’ of racialized youth. In the interest of maintaining confidentiality, I will use the initials of the youth I worked with when quoting them: FA, GS, HC, LA, SH and YS. All the youth involved in the project attend schools in Toronto.

In working with the youth in the project, it was evident that each of them had experienced and/or witnessed acts of racism in their school. In the initial stage of the project, before we moved on to ‘filming’ we discussed the issue to racism in the schools that the youth were attending.

Youth were first asked to give their perspective on racism in Toronto schools. All the youth were in consensus about the prevalence of racism in schools:

“My view on racism in Toronto schools is that racism largely targets BIPOC students, in particular Black students. This targeting is due a type of collective ignorance, where a lack of understanding and interaction leads Black and POC students to be stereotyped, misrepresented, and ostracized. It doesn't help that a majority of teachers and school staff are NOT people of color.” (FA)

It was also noted that there is very little is said and done about the issue of racism in school, even when students voice their concerns:

“I feel like there is a considerable amount of racism in Toronto schools, but most of it is pushed under the rug and hidden so that a lot of people do not know about it. I know of a lot of people who have experienced racism throughout their academic careers, and even if they recognized it as racism, they did not feel comfortable enough to speak up about it. In my personal experience, racism is pretty prominent in Toronto schools, but just not readily discussed.” (HC)

Youth also feel insecure about speaking about their experiences of racism for fear of being ‘labelled’ by peers/administration. They aren’t always informed of the procedure/processes to address issues of racism within the school environment as it’s not openly spoken about or addressed at schools:

“I believe that racism in Toronto schools occur on a regular basis. We are not able to hear many students speaking out about it, because they don’t want be looked upon as a “snitch”. Racism should be condoned not only by the schools but by the peers also. Many students are not able to advocate for an affected student because they are not sure on what their next step should be. Schools should be held accountable in providing extra support to students and making sure that they are constantly pushing multiculturalism and diversity to make it a norm.” (GS)

“I believe not only racism but all kinds of discrimination are prevalent especially in Toronto schools. I believe many are not aware of the effects that they are having/ can have towards BIPOC. I also think it's fair to mention how little is being done about such major issues.” (LA)

It is evident from these statements and in the conversation that we had on zoom, that racism is very much a reality in the school systems in Toronto. The two critical insights that came out of these reflections include: (1) racism is not always overt and therefore it is sometimes hard to identify and (2) (most importantly) racialized youth experience other forms of discrimination alongside with racism.

Regent Park does not have high school in the community; therefore, youth have to leave their community and attend schools in different parts of Toronto where there isn’t always the same representation of their identities among students and staff. Youth who attend schools where student populations are predominantly white, identify more instances of racism as compared to students who are in schools with more diverse representations. Racialized youth from Regent Park also experience other forms of marginalization. Their racial, cultural and

social identities are even more highlighted at schools and are used to impose stereotypes of them. Administration, teachers and peers perceive them through the stereotypes they hear in the media and ‘popular’ assumptions of their identities.

I asked the youth to speak about instances where they personally experienced racism at school. Their experiences not only provided evidence to the experiences of racism in schools but made clear the impact of racism on how they experience their learning environment:

“I have experienced racism many times throughout my school career, and especially in high school. A lot of the time it is mixed with classism or Islamophobia in some way, so it’s not exclusively racism, but I believe one of the worst ways that racism has manifested in Toronto schools (and probably other institutions), are the numerous microaggressions that are displayed on a daily basis. Many times, students and teachers are ignorant of what they are speaking about, and accidentally say something hurtful or insensitive towards a minority group. That happens all too often, but it’s even worse because when they are called out by students like myself, and the few others who are confident enough to speak up about it, they brush it off as if it was unimportant. Even in classes like English, where racism and the topic being an “other” is often discussed through fictional narratives, most of my classmates do not know how to speak about the topic in a respectful manner, and would rather just not speak about it at all, in fear of saying something wrong. It’s the same case with teachers, as they will mention something like “let’s not say the n-word in class although it’s written in the book,” however will not stop their own students from saying it in presentations.” (HC)

Another youth spoke about experiences of racism and discrimination based on her culture and religion. In this instance, youth felt there was no attempt to understand her or her experiences and teachers and peers were comfortable making assumptions of her identity:

“My experiences are not singular because of racism, but instead feel very targeted and isolated because my majority white, upper/middle class classmates and teachers understood nothing about the way I grew up, my culture, or my religion. My teachers made assumptions about my mental health and overall capabilities because of their very narrow understanding of my home life; and I felt that they made these assumptions very evident to the rest of my peers. When our classes were having discussions on topics like poverty, race, or “ethnic” cultures I felt very, very tokenized. It seemed like my peers only wanted to interact

with me when they would "use" my experiences to benefit their own academic growth." (FA)

Many of the youth also echoed how these expressions of racism are masked under the pretence of a 'joke', diminishing the impact it has for the racialized youth:

"I did not have any severe cases of racism towards me in school. I only had minor cases such as how every South-Asian person is classified as an Indian or just people making fun of traditional meals we eat or traditional clothing we wear. But there's also other racism in schools such as people using derogatory terms and thinking is funny or just cover it up by saying it's just a joke even though they had harsh intent." (SK)

These experiences of racism by racialized youth have been echoed again and again. These stories have been shared by the many racialized I have had the opportunity to work with in the past twenty years, youth from St. Jamestown, Scarborough and Regent Park. Racialized youth are regularly being made to feel there is no place for their identities in school spaces and are made to feel 'othered' for being themselves. There is no real commitment from the institutions they attend to change their narratives. The push for multiculturalism to shift some of these experiences fails to provide safe spaces for racialized youth and has aided in silencing their voices further. Multiculturalism has focused on providing spaces for displaying culture and food but has failed to hold space for their real stories and experiences.

As important as it was to document the experiences of racism in schools for these youth, I also wanted provide them with an opportunity to speak about what they see as important in moving towards a more inclusive and equitable educational experience. Most prominently, racialized youth want their voices heard, a space for their experiences to be shared and ideas for change to be shared:

“I believe it is important to hear students’ voices, especially students who identify as BIPOC. Having workshops to discuss the creation or implementation of practices that would increase inclusivity within schools would be beneficial, as everyone will have the chance to provide ideas relevant to their own experiences. I also believe that teachers need to be more open-minded and if any racist behaviours of teachers are reported, it should be taken seriously.” (YS)

“Schools need to try and push diversity within them and try and make it a norm. Many schools that are located within a suburban neighbourhood do not have many coloured students. This makes the minority, prone to getting bullied for looking different. Schools should try and host more in school events that show the students different cultures and events that promote multiculturalism. Schools also need to take responsibility in informing students on what it means to be racist. Many students say something racist or do a racist act without the realization of it, due to the lack of information. Finally, schools should provide resources on what to do if a racist act has occurred. The resources should include who they can contact anonymously if they feel unsafe in revealing their identity.” (GS)

Youth want to see representation/diversity in administration and teaching staff. They want teachers and staff at schools have education and training address issues of racism in schools and be able to provide the supports needed. Youth want education that will help them understand their experiences, to not only be able to name it but also be equipped to work towards change:

*“First of all, we need diverse teachers and support staff! We need to have **mandatory** courses on social justice, race, and equity issues. Secondly, the school board needs to be much, much more proactive when students complain about Racist teachers. We've been talking about racism for so long, we need less focus groups and uncomfortable conformations, and more action!” (FA)*

“For equity and inclusivity to be a sustainable part of Toronto schools and our education system, is for teachers and other staff to be well-equipped with teaching sensitive topics such as stereotypes, the history of Canada, racism itself, and for them to be able to teach all topics with a general background knowledge of how to treat marginalized youth and people of colour. The high school that I attend does not have many black, indigenous, or students of colour, so it can be difficult for them to feel like they belong in a school full of kids who have grown up together, and are used to being the majority. Adults in that environment need to know how to interact with youth that may be feeling left out without alienating them further. If equity and inclusion was a legitimate goal for Toronto schools to achieve, I believe the majority of teachers would need to be taught the differences between people, and they would have to learn to create a safer environment for incoming students. The onus should not be placed on the already excluded

students to create a space for themselves while also going through the struggles that regular teenagers and ninth graders go through. Rather, those in places of authority should feel the responsibility to create an environment that makes the transition to high school and the lives of teenagers easier.” (HC)

We still function in a society where a majority of those in power are white. There exists an inherent notion of mistrust between, ‘white’ authorities and the ‘othered’, based on the many years of experiences being silenced and unheard within these systems. To have to prove your experiences of racism time and time again becomes exhausting for youth. There are so many unreported incidents of racism because youth don’t feel their stories are heard. Too often their experiences are dismissed as a ‘misunderstanding’ on the youths’ part. One thing I longed for as a youth in the school system, and I hear voiced from so many racialized youths, is the need for diversity in school faculty and administration. Young people want to see themselves represented in teachers and administrators. They want the curriculum to reflect their experiences and stories. They want education that reflects them. They want educators to be educated about their identities and experiences. They want safer spaces that can foster dialogue for real meaningful changes. They deserve all of this.

Conclusion

This research project has reaffirmed what I know about the realities of racism within Toronto schools. Critical Race Theory and Participatory Research helped me create spaces for telling and sharing counter-stories. This theory and methodology were important reminders for me to centre the voices of youth who are impacted daily by racism and given them the power to amplify their own stories and expertise. This is an important step in how we can move towards eradicating racism and all forms of discrimination.

Participatory Visual Methodology was very effective in providing a safer space for racialized youth to capture their ‘voices’. The goal of Participatory Visual Methodology is for the research to benefit those who are participating. The project was successful as it supported creating a space for racialized youth to share their experiences of racism. Sharing their stories with each other helped to validate their experiences and strengthen their collective voice. The youth group agreed the issue of racism in schools needs to be highlighted, specifically working at creating opportunities for other racialized youth to share their experiences. Some of the suggestion was to show the film to staff/youth at Pathways to Education as part of their monthly movie screening and discussion. Other suggestion was to connect with other youth serving agencies to screen film and engage in community dialogue. Youth felt the project as a good starting place and were committed to taking the work and conversation about racism in schools in Toronto to other spaces in the hope to move towards change.

Participatory Visual Methodology encourages researchers to co-create with community by facilitating dialogue and supporting the creation of the ‘stories’ through visuals drawings, photographs, murals or videos (Lorenz and Kolb, 2009). My role as a community worker within

Regent Park and my established relationship with a few of the youth helped foster trust within the group. This was instrumental in allowing the youth to openly share their experiences of racism within schools. At times, my pre-existing positionality as a support staff, hindered my identity as a researcher for myself. In my role as a support worker, my role is to be a facilitator/resource/support for the goals they set out. Being a researcher, at times, I felt I needed to constantly remind myself of the what is required of me as a researcher, which means I had to set some parameters for the project and timelines. In my role as support worker, youth are the ones determining the parameter of our work together and timelines associated with it.

Our school systems continue to fail many racialized young people. We are constantly speaking about these issues in boardrooms with very little representation from the people who are impacted by the issues. It is important that we rethink these dynamics. The youth that I worked with in this project were eager to tell their stories. They found sharing their stories through this alternative form validating. They valued the freedom to create and bring awareness to an issue they often experience but can only speak about amongst themselves. I hope more of these opportunities are brought forward to communities and encourage researchers to consider these non-traditional methods of investigating an issue.

Finally, we need to reform the education system to be reflective of its learners. There are inadequacies within the system (e.g. curriculum, texts, classroom) that reflect an inability to include the history, experiences and achievements of diverse communities (Dei, 1995). The system still predominately reflects the histories, experiences and values of those in power, immersed in white ideologies. In the report *Towards Race Equity in Education* (2017), James discusses the vital role that schools play in shaping the identities and experiences of racialized youth. He emphasis the need for teachers to support students in understanding how the

experiences of racialized youth are not an ‘individual problem’ but a systemic one. The need for shifts in the practices within schools and classroom was voiced over and over in the stories the youth shared. They want education that they can relate, that reflects their experiences. Hopefully, their voices and video will travel far and contribute to shaping their envisioned future.

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